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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: rethinking and strengthening social
development in the contemporary world**

**Statement submitted by Association pour la promotion de la lutte
contre les violences faites aux femmes et la participation au
développement de la femme africaine, a non-governmental
organization in special consultative status with the Economic and
Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

Dealing with gender-related stakes and challenges in combating poverty, and empowering women

Objective and purpose

The Association's objective and purpose consist in seeking ways and means conducive to women's involvement in and integration into a gender-sensitive process of poverty reduction.

The concept of development is more complex than commonly thought. Development is not an attribute that a people or a country possesses or lacks. The term comprises a set of economic, social, cultural and political characteristics, each of which may be at a more or less advanced stage.

That term, used in the social sciences to designate phenomena that vary depending on the period, place or situation, is subject to some discussion. Thus, a given country may at any time be regarded as developed in certain ways and as developing in others.

To echo the Secretary-General of the United Nations, "our world is one of terrible contradictions. Plenty of food but one billion people go hungry. Lavish lifestyles for a few, but poverty for too many others. Huge advances in medicine while mothers die every day in childbirth, and children die every day from drinking dirty water. Billions spent on weapons to kill people instead of keeping them safe". The peoples of the world wait for their leaders' response. They expect solutions, not half-measures or excuses.

Poverty is synonymous with inequality. Poverty is rejection of all fundamental rights. It is not generated by the destitute but created and maintained by the "system" that the majority of decision-making authorities have built within society. Poverty is the outcome of disparities which are closely interrelated with the distribution of power and resources and prevent certain groups from fully participating in the economic, social, political and cultural life of their communities.

A key step towards poverty reduction would be the establishment of an empowering political, economic, social and cultural environment in which civil society in general, and women in particular, would be enabled to participate in the making of decisions that affect their lives. The foundation of democracy consists in a civil society through which citizens cooperate to act, express their interests, exchange information, attain shared goals and exert a positive influence on Governments.

Development of any type is not merely a growth indicator but, first and foremost, a choice of values. Social development can only be the gradual fulfilment of a twofold potential: the promise held by any human community and its members, and the possibilities offered by the community's physical environment, which the community uses to subsist and to ensure the subsistence of future generations.

The gender approach, which entails due regard for the various opportunities open to men and women, their social roles and the relations existing between them, must be followed closely. Those fundamental elements affect society's development process and the outcomes of the policies, programmes and projects of international

and national organizations. Gender issues are intertwined with all aspects of the economic and social life of individuals, including at the daily and private levels, and of society, which assigns a specific role to every man and woman.

Access to financial services to ensure economic growth, and the human being's empowerment must become a human right for women as well as men. Over and above the role of rural finance in ensuring a sustainable standard of living, targeted action must be taken in favour of women so as to help to create a series of virtuous circles leading from their social and political empowerment to a higher level of well-being. In that connection, microfinance, well conceived and managed at almost zero cost, can be conducive to certain facets of women's empowerment. Enhancing women's access to microfinance can improve family well-being and the appropriate channelling of economic resources, such as credit and savings.

Recommendations

The Association formulates the following recommendations:

- (a) Launching urgently (in view of a global context in which economic capital is volatile and fickle while women are at risk of being stifled by discriminatory requirements and the holders of economic power) development approaches and expression tools conducive to women's empowerment and to enabling women to take advantage, individually or collectively, of the rules and possibilities of the self-promotion system;
- (b) Improving data acquisition principles and methods for evaluating poverty among women (including those with disabilities) and providing them with access to financial resources (credit);
- (c) Facilitating the conjunction of gender considerations and poverty reduction efforts in development programmes and projects;
- (d) Enhancing women's access to microfinancing services. This may ensure their economic empowerment by enabling them to make decisions regarding the use of their savings and loans, invest in their own activities, fund financial contributions of their own or exercise greater control over household activities. They may thus increase their productivity and the income that they generate, and participate more extensively in the market;
- (e) In the framework of the poverty reduction strategy papers drawn up by most Governments, setting up a reliable information system on poverty in order to develop an up-to-date data bank shared by the authorities, the private sector, the development partners and civil society with a view to effective management of poverty reduction activities, and to ownership by the population through information transparency;
- (f) Keeping target population groups better informed with regard to existing opportunities, which often are monopolized by specialists and insiders;
- (g) Reducing the duration and volume of technical and other studies in favour of undertaking, on the ground, tangible activities which have been tested and proven their effectiveness elsewhere.

Generally speaking, the reduction of gender-based inequalities as a whole could, in the long term, secure an acceptable standard of living for a significant section of the vulnerable population by enabling the persons concerned to rely on their income to acquire first necessity goods, pay for medical care in approved centres, ensure decent education for their children and reduce the various forms of violence to which they are exposed.
